IN THE CLAIMS:

The text of all pending claims, (including withdrawn claims) is set forth below. Cancelled and not entered claims are indicated with claim number and status only. The claims as listed below show added text with <u>underlining</u> and deleted text with ~~strikethrough~~. The status of each claim is indicated with one of (original), (currently amended), (cancelled), (withdrawn), (new), (previously presented), or (not entered).

1.   (currently amended) An image <u>lightness</u>~~tone~~ level estimating method for estimating a <u>lightness</u>~~tone~~ level of an image, comprising:

dividing an original image into a plurality of image sub-areas according to tone level information of pixels forming the image;

computing <u>an average lightness</u>~~a characteristic amount for each~~ of the plurality of sub-areas producing <u>lightness</u>~~characteristic~~ amounts; and

computing a statistic amount for estimation of the <u>lightness</u>~~tone color value~~ level of a whole of the original image using the <u>average lightness</u>~~characteristic amounts~~ for each of the plurality of sub-areas.

Claims 2 - 13   (cancelled)

14.   (currently amended) An image correcting method for correcting an original image, comprising:

dividing an original image into a plurality of image sub-areas responsive to tone level information of pixels forming the image;

computing <u>an average lightness</u>~~a characteristic amount for each~~ of the plurality of sub-areas producing characteristic amounts;

computing a statistic amount for estimation of the <u>lightness</u>~~tone color value~~ level of a whole of the original image using the <u>average lightness</u>~~characteristic amounts~~ for each of the plurality of sub-areas;

comparing the statistic amount with a predetermined value;

determining a correcting parameter based on the comparison result; and

correcting the original image using the correcting parameter.

15.   (currently amended) An image correcting method for correcting an original

image, comprising:

 generating a plurality of corrected images by correcting the original image using a plurality of different correcting parameters;

 dividing the plurality of corrected images respectively into a plurality of image sub-areas responsive to tone level information of pixels forming the image;

 computing <u>an average lightness</u>~~characteristic amounts~~ for the plurality of sub-areas corresponding to the plurality of corrected images;

 computing an image statistic amount indicating a <u>lightness</u>~~tone color value~~ level of a whole corrected image using the <u>average lightness</u>~~characteristic amounts~~ for the plurality of sub-areas for the plurality of corrected images; and

 defining a corrected image obtained using a correcting parameter corresponding to an image statistic amount closest to a predetermined value among the image statistic amounts as an appropriate corrected image.

 16. (canceled)

 17. (currently amended) An image correction apparatus which corrects an original image, comprising:

 an area division unit dividing the original image into a plurality of image sub-areas responsive to tone level information of pixels forming the image;

 <u>an average lightness</u>~~a characteristic~~ amount computation unit computing <u>an average lightness</u>~~a characteristic amount~~ for each of the plurality of sub-areas producing characteristic amounts;

 a statistic amount computation unit computing a statistic amount indicating a <u>lightness</u>~~tone~~ level of a whole image using the <u>average lightness</u>~~characteristic amounts~~ of each of the plurality of sub-areas;

 a correcting parameter setting unit comparing the statistic amount with a predetermined value, and determining a correcting parameter based on a comparison result; and

 an image correction unit correcting the original image using the correcting parameter.

 18. (currently amended) The apparatus according to claim 17, further comprising a weight coefficient computation unit computing a weight coefficient for each area, wherein said statistic amount computation unit computes the statistic amount using the <u>average lightness</u>~~characteristic amount~~ for each area and the weight coefficient for each area.

19.   (currently amended) An image correction apparatus which corrects an original image, comprising:

a first image correction unit correcting the original image using a plurality of correcting parameters and generating a plurality of corrected images;

an area division unit dividing each of the plurality of corrected images into a plurality of image sub-areas responsive to tone level information of pixels forming the image;

<u>an average lightness</u>~~a characteristic amount~~ computation unit computing <u>an average lightness</u>~~a characteristic amount~~ for each of the plurality of sub-areas ~~producing characteristic amounts~~;

a statistic amount computation unit computing a statistic amount indicating <u>lightness</u>~~tone color value~~ level of a whole image using the <u>average lightness</u>~~characteristic amounts~~ of each of the plurality of sub-areas; and

a second image correction unit determining a corrected image obtained using the correcting parameter corresponding to the statistic amount closest to a predetermined value among the plurality of statistic amounts as a correction result.

Claims 20 - 31 (cancelled)

32.   (currently amended) A computer-readable storage medium storing a program used to direct a computer for estimating a tone level of an image to perform a process, comprising:

dividing an original image into a plurality of image sub-areas responsive to tone level information of pixels forming the image;

computing <u>an average lightness</u>~~a characteristic amount~~ for each of the plurality of sub-areas ~~producing characteristic amounts~~; and

computing a statistic amount for estimation of the <u>lightness</u>~~tone color value~~ level of a whole of the original image using the <u>average lightness</u>~~characteristic amounts~~ for each of the plurality of sub-areas.

33.   (currently amended) A computer-readable storage medium storing a program used to direct a computer for correcting an original image to perform a process, comprising:

dividing an original image into a plurality of sub-areas responsive to tone level information of pixels forming the image;

computing <u>an average lightness</u>~~a characteristic amount~~ for each of the plurality of sub-areas ~~producing characteristic amounts~~;

computing a statistic amount for estimation of the <u>lightness</u>~~tone color value~~ level of a whole of the original image using the <u>average lightness</u>~~characteristic amounts~~ for each of the plurality of sub-areas;

comparing the statistic amount with a predetermined value;

determining a correcting parameter based on the comparison result; and

correcting the original image using the correcting parameter.

34.   (currently amended) A computer-readable storage medium storing a program used to direct a computer for correcting an original image to perform a process, comprising:

generating a plurality of corrected images by correcting the original image using a plurality of different correcting parameters;

dividing the plurality of corrected images respectively into a plurality of sub-areas responsive to tone level information of pixels forming the image;

computing <u>an average lightness</u>~~characteristic amounts~~ for the plurality of sub-areas corresponding to the plurality of corrected images;

computing an image statistic amount indicating a <u>lightness</u>~~tone color value~~ level of a corrected image using the <u>average lightness</u>~~characteristic amounts~~ for a plurality of corrected images; and

defining a corrected image obtained using a correcting parameter corresponding to an image statistic amount closest to a predetermined value among the image statistic amounts as an appropriate corrected image.

Claims 35 - 38 (cancelled)

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